

12 Transportation



St. Louis, Missouri

Key Message 1

Transportation at Risk

A reliable, safe, and efficient U.S. transportation system is at risk from increases in heavy precipitation, coastal flooding, heat, wildfires, and other extreme events, as well as changes to average temperature. Throughout this century, climate change will continue to pose a risk to U.S. transportation infrastructure, with regional differences.

Key Message 2

Impacts to Urban and Rural Transportation

Extreme events that increasingly impact the transportation network are inducing societal and economic consequences, some of which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. In the absence of intervention, future changes in climate will lead to increasing transportation challenges, particularly because of system complexity, aging infrastructure, and dependency across sectors.

Key Message 3

Vulnerability Assessments

Engineers, planners, and researchers in the transportation field are showing increasing interest and sophistication in understanding the risks that climate hazards pose to transportation assets and services. Transportation practitioner efforts demonstrate the connection between advanced assessment and the implementation of adaptive measures, though many communities still face challenges and barriers to action.

Transportation is the backbone of economic activity, connecting manufacturers with supply chains, consumers with products and tourism, and people with their workplaces, homes, and communities across both urban and rural landscapes. However, the ability of the transportation sector to perform reliably, safely, and efficiently is undermined by a changing climate. Heavy precipitation, coastal flooding, heat, wildfires, freeze–thaw cycles, and changes in average precipitation and temperature impact individual assets across all modes. These impacts threaten the performance of the entire network, with critical ramifications for economic vitality and mobility, particularly for vulnerable populations and urban infrastructure.

Sea level rise is progressively making coastal roads and bridges more vulnerable and less functional. Many coastal cities across the United States have already experienced an increase in high tide flooding that reduces the functionality of low-elevation roadways, rail, and bridges, often causing costly congestion and damage to infrastructure. Inland transportation infrastructure is highly vulnerable to intense rainfall and flooding. In some regions,

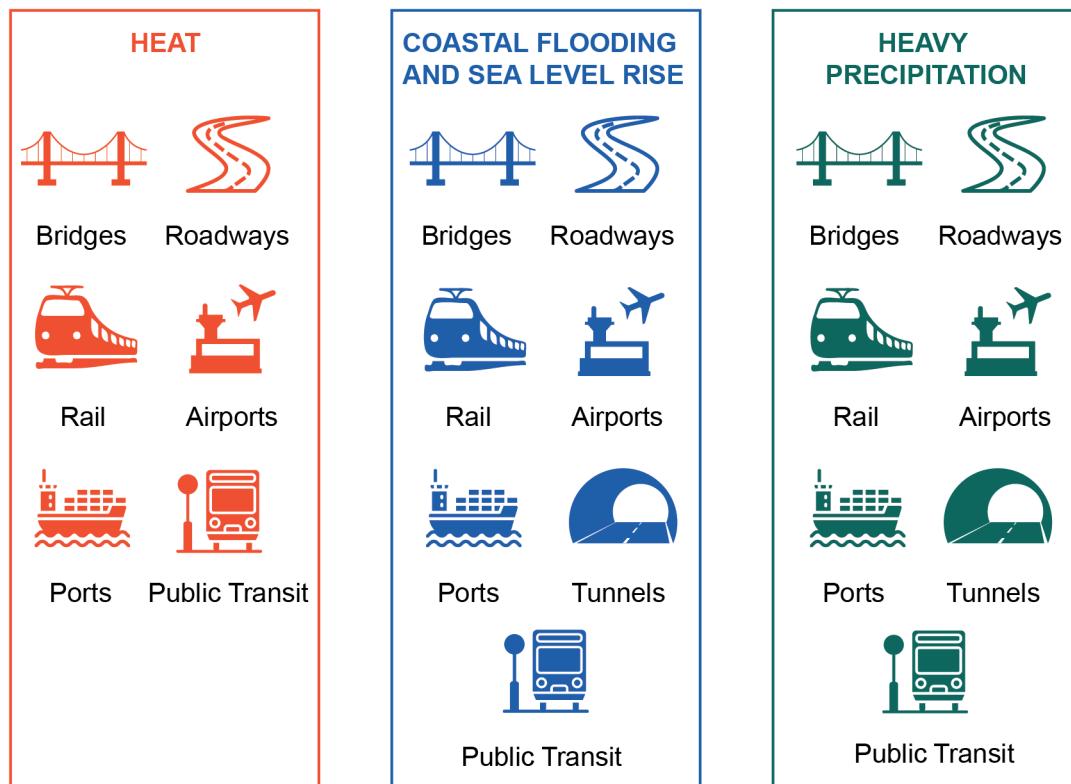
the increasing frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events reduce transportation system efficiency and increase accident risk. High temperatures can stress bridge integrity and have caused more frequent and extended delays to passenger and freight rail systems and air traffic.

Transportation is not only vulnerable to impacts of climate change but also contributes significantly to the causes of climate change. In 2016, the transportation sector became the top contributor to U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. The transportation system is rapidly growing and evolving in response to market demand and innovation. This growth could make climate mitigation and adaptation progressively more challenging to implement and more important to achieve. However, transportation practitioners are increasingly invested in addressing climate risks, as evidenced in more numerous and diverse assessments of transportation sector vulnerabilities across the United States.

For full chapter, including references and Traceable Accounts, see <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/transportation>.

U.S. Transportation Assets and Goals at Risk

Climate Change and Notable Vulnerabilities of Transportation Assets



National Performance Goals at Risk



Heavy precipitation, coastal flooding, heat, and changes in average precipitation and temperature affect assets (such as roads and bridges) across all modes of transportation. The figure shows major climate-related hazards and the transportation assets impacted. Photos illustrate national performance goals (listed in 23 U.S.C. § 150) that are at risk due to climate-related hazards. From Figure 12.1 (Source: USGCRP. Photo credits from left to right: JAXPORT, Meredith Fordham Hughes [CC BY-NC 2.0]; Oregon Department of Transportation [CC BY 2.0]; NPS—Mississippi National River and Recreation Area; Flickr user Tom Driggers [CC BY 2.0]; Flickr user Mike Mozart [CC BY 2.0]; Flickr user Jeff Turner [CC BY 2.0]; Flickr user William Garrett [CC BY 2.0] — see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/> for specific Creative Commons licenses).